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Chastising with Scorpions: Reading the Old Testament in Early Modern England

Kevin Killeen

ABSTRACT In this essay, Kevin Killeen explores an ingrained yet contentious reading habit of early modern England, the mapping of the biblical onto contemporary politics. Book history, with its focus on the physical object, has at times served to occlude the protocols of such typology. By analyzing typological readings of the biblical kings Rehoboam and Jeroboam, he shows some of the political, spiritual, and hermeneutic uses to which the Bible was put. **KEYWORDS:** biblical interpretation in early modern England; John Cave; Joseph Hall; John Donne; John Maxwell

☞ **EZEKIAS WOODWARD**, writing in *The Kings chronicle* in 1643, prefaces his text tracing the acts of the kings of Judah with the remark: “I thank God that I did search the scripture: for now I can give a full and cleare account of all the affairs now a days.”¹ He goes on to do so in lavish detail, tracing the king-by-king relevance to the Civil War of each of the Judean monarchs. Though they are largely remote figures to modern scholarship, the political lives of biblical kings were familiar, in nuanced detail, to early modern readers, and were widely deployed and contested: there are not many of us who can distinguish between a Jehoash and a Jehoram, a Zimri and an Uzziah, as confidently as we can a Caesar and a Brutus, a Tarquin and an Aeneas. The biblical cast rarely make it above the footnote line of modern scholarly works, and yet they garnered vast amounts of early modern commentary, turned to a dizzying range of political, cultural, and social ends. The “biblical,” when marginalized as a Puritan concern, has often occluded in turn some of the most interesting strategies and sources in the history of reading.

Typologies and political parallelism are in some way familiar territory for scholarship; one does not get very far into seventeenth-century thought without

1. Ezekias Woodward, *The Kings chronicle in two sections wherein we have the acts of the wicked and good kings of Judah fully declared, with the ordering of their militia and grave observations thereupon* (London, 1643), Epistle Dedicatory, A2v.

encountering such models. The sophisticated ways that they intersect with histories of reading, however, have not received sustained scholarly attention, it seems to me. In labyrinthine trails of interpretation and dispute, writers of the early modern period grapple with both the biblical text and other interpreters, creating a rich mine of evidence for the ways people read. Reading the scriptures as interpretative of contemporary political tumult is pervasive, across political allegiances, but it is evident too that there is common ground in the reading strategies at work, and it is the nature of these strategies that is the subject of this essay.

Biblical exegesis is among the most formalized areas of early modern interpretation, one that codifies and makes explicit its own techniques of reading. Its methodologies are widely debated, strongly contested, and hedged in sets of presumptions about who constituted a fit audience for its easily abused and occasionally dangerous Word. Biblical exposition constitutes a key resource in discerning the reading protocols of the era—by far the most significant in terms of bulk, the most prestigious in terms of its complexity, and the most rigorously theorized.² The Bible has, of course, not been ignored in thinking about the history of reading, but it has often been conceived in material terms rather than in relation to the details and content of its exposition.³ Although there has been some excellent research into the kinds of reading “technologies” that accrued around the Bible, some studies have treated the marginal annotation on a biblical verse in separate terms from and as more revealing than a sermon that unpacks the same text. There is a presumption, perhaps, that what’s scribbled on the side, offhand and unguarded, even unconsciously, may tell us more than the turgid theological and rhetorical protocols of exegesis. In contrast to the sometimes erratic and by-its-very-nature patchy evidence of marginalia or the material cultures associated with the book, however, biblical reading was subject to the most minute scrutiny and self-reflection.

Given the relative obscurity to modern criticism of the forty or so Israelite kings (aside from David and Solomon, and some few others, perhaps Ahab or Jehu), the Bible is among the most neglected of resources both in histories of reading and in histories of political theory in the period.⁴ The scriptures, scrutinized across social classes and political allegiances, subject both to the highest levels of scholarship and the outer reaches of radical interpretation, attracted a broader and no less sophisticated collection of readings than the politically inflected classics, which scholars have much more

2. Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000). Green’s study traces the extent to which the print output of the period is overwhelmingly religious in orientation.

3. For example, Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible,” in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia, 2002), 42–79.

4. Studies of Milton and Dryden have not neglected biblical precedents; for example, Stephen Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden’s Poetry: The Arts of Disguise* (Princeton, 1994). Some degree of attention has also focused on the use of typology to represent monarchs, examples of which include Alexandra Walsham, “‘A Very Deborah?’ The myth of Elizabeth I as a providential monarch,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke, U.K., 2003), 143–68. See too Christopher Hill’s impressive work, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London, 1993).

closely associated with the history of reading.⁵ The hermeneutics by which Old Testament figures are transposed typologically onto both the New Testament and contemporary politics are intricate yet widespread, reading strategies to be found across learned treatise and popular tract, court pulpit and parish sermon. The Bible demanded of early modern readers a sense of omnipresent history, in which God speaks to the political moment via a stock of exemplary prefigurations, which interpreters must map onto their own immediate circumstances. Tracing such practices will bring us back to a consideration of the role of the scriptures as a political thesaurus and mirror of the present. The second part of the essay will turn to the ways in which scriptural monarchs were mapped onto the seventeenth century, to illustrate the vast number and variety of readings that accrue around such apparently obscure kings, and how they serve for understanding what people did with texts. In this section I trace the ways in which biblical rulers served less as a kind of direct mirror for a particular early modern king or, indeed, protector, but rather as a nuanced and adaptable language to voice complaints about oppression and deprivation as much as rebellion and usurpation. In so doing, the essay will endeavor to reinvigorate the notion of typology as a productive, troublesome, and astonishingly versatile tool in the arsenal of early modern readers.

☞ Reading the Old Testament

Readers in the seventeenth century were adept at the kinds of transformation of the Old Testament by which contemporary politics might be dressed up in typological garb. The Old Testament simply made no sense for early modern Christians in its own Judaic terms. It was a book of Jewish theology of the Jewish nation, toward which the era expressed either antipathy or ambivalence. Its histories therefore only made sense when they were read as the precursor of the New, and only after they had been subject to a process of transposition in which their ostensible meaning was reimagined. Christian traditions of reading are unforgiving in this respect—Augustine has it that if you are not a Christian, you are unable to read. In his *Expositions on the Psalms* he writes, “The Jew carries a book from which the Christian may believe. Our librarians are what they have become,” although they remain unable to read.⁶ The Jews have only the first

5. The history of reading has been focused heavily on humanist education practices in the reception of the classics; see, for example, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78. Similarly see David Norbrook on the reception of Lucan in *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge, 1999), 23–62; Craig Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: “Pessimistic” Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford, 2007); Kallendorf, *The Virgilian Tradition: Book History and the History of Reading in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, U.K., 2007); Jessica Winston, “Seneca in Early Elizabethan England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2006): 29–58.

6. *Expositions on the Psalms*, ed. John Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding (New York, 2001), 56.9; see, for a related account of Jewish inability to read, and partial hermeneutics, Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1997), 3:20–32 (pp. 72–75). See Thomas Luxon, *Literal Figures, Puritan Allegory, and the Reformation Crisis in Identity* (Chicago, 1995), 26. The Jesuit James Sharpe refers to both Augustine and St. Cyprian on the way the Jews cannot understand scripture; see *The triall of the protestant private spirit Wherein their doctrine, making the sayd spirit the sole ground & meanes of their beliefe, is confuted* (Saint-Omer, 1630), 119.

half of an intricately coded meaning; they are in the situation of somebody waiting for the verb to complete a German or Latin sentence. Being able to read involves, for Augustine—and this holds true through to the seventeenth century—an integral act of sub-reading, that anything in the Old only makes sense when it is translated through the New. From the Davidic pastoral to the Solomonic symbolism of the Temple, from the idolatrous kings to the altered covenant, the reader has to conduct a transposition of the text: its meaning refracted through the lens of Christian theology and the lens of later circumstances. The actors of the Old Testament are in the difficult position that, whatever they suppose their motives to be and whatever the political intrigue they are involved in, their actions are primarily engaging in prefigurative deeds they do not understand—of either the New Testament or the seventeenth-century divine drama of England. Thus early modern readers are not looking simply for psychological motivation or even narrative (historical) continuity in the Old Testament text: discerning God's providential narrative, his record of intervention in human affairs and the causes of his occasional wrath, was paramount.⁷

There are few such sophisticated acts of reading—sophisticated though also ubiquitous—demanding a *transposition* of key (musically speaking) in order for a text to make the most basic sense. For early modern English interpreters, this shift from the Old Testament to the New was required to reveal the literal, not the allegorical or the tropological, sense. When early modern Protestants speak of the primacy of the literal sense of the Bible, however, they do not mean the un-nuanced lexical shell and surface of the words, as modern “literal” interpretation might. Discerning the literal demands, in regard to the Bible's historical texts, was a negotiation between the bare event and its historical “fulfillment” in the future.⁸ George Lawson, the author of *Theo-Politica*, proposes in his *Exposition of Hebrews* that this is the very nature of the literal in interpreting the historical part of the Old Testament: that it refers in polysemous fashion both to the New Testament and to contemporary history, to past, present, and future:

The words understood both of the Type and the Anti-type make but one literal sense: For that I call the literal sense which is intended by the Spirit. And this is the excellency of the Scripture, that by the same word it signifies not onely one but several things, and that as the words signify things immediately, at first hand, so these things signify other things—things past, or present, or things to come[.]⁹

7. Deborah Shuger, in *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), gives the most convincing account of the purposes of biblical scholarship.

8. See Henri De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 2 vols., trans. Mark Sebanc (vol. 1) and E. M. Macierowski (vol. 2) (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1998); James Dougal Fleming, “Making Sense of Science and the Literal: Modern Semantics and Early Modern Hermeneutics,” in *The Word and the World: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Science*, ed. Kevin Killeen and Peter J. Forshaw (Houndsmills, U.K., 2007).

9. George Lawson, *An exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the text is cleared, Theopolitica improved, the Socinian comment examined* (London, 1662), 9.

The typological shifts by which the figures of the Old Testament could be prefigurative of both the New and of contemporary events are supported by a complex reading theory that insists on a constant negotiation of meaning between text and event and a perpetual modulation between the divine political presence in the Bible and the providential “evidence” of God’s action in the present. The idea of reiterated historical-divine action is, at some level, a theory of history—the omnipresent action of God and the omni-applicability of the scriptures as the key to divine intention—but it is equally, if more prosaically, a theory of reading, of the types and anti-types that were so adroitly and consistently managed across the sermon and theological literatures of the era. Lawson’s claim that the Bible speaks at multi-temporal levels is central to the historical hermeneutics in early modern Protestant practice: indeed it is a commonplace exegetical presumption.

An important and controversial example of this multi-temporal role, with strong political import, was the nature of legal precedent in the Bible, which demanded a particularly careful hermeneutics. For John Cave, in a 1679 sermon, the nature of the “Mosaical dispensation” and the apparently straightforward legal injunctions of the Old Testament were intrinsically cloudy and unfathomable. The extended set of Levitical precepts was not on its own terms a readable text at all, lacking the interpretative framework of the New:

[T]he light of the Mosaical dispensation was not without a Great Alloy or mixture of darkness, the points of our Salvation were but obscurely shadowed in the Typical or Ceremonial Law, but are now made manifest.¹⁰

He describes how a series of redemptive promises made to suit a historical moment, the return of Israel from its long Babylonian captivity, actually has its meaning only in the solid “substance” of the Gospel, in which the sudden lightening of a load might begin, for Cave, to make sense: “These were the blessings promised more immediately in some kind to the Jews upon their return from Babylon, but more amply and in their best sense enjoyed by us under the Gospel who have the substance of their type.”¹¹ Just as the Persian King Cyrus may have thought he was pursuing his own dynastic expansionism, when unbeknown to him his actions were designed by God to release the Jews finally from their captivity, so too the Jews may have thought they were being rescued because they were at heart God’s chosen people. For Cave, however, as for early modern Christianity more generally, the meaning of all such events is to be grasped only when it is transposed forward to the New Testament and to the present.

10. John Cave, *A Sermon Preached at the Assizes in Leicester* (London, 1679), 23–24. On the more radical forces of antinomian thought, see David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England* (Stanford, Calif., 2004); Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Aldershot, U.K., 2001); Gertrude Huehns, *Antinomianism in English History, with Special Reference to the Period 1640–1660* (London, 1951).

11. Cave, *A Sermon Preached at the Assizes*, 3.

This reading process, involving such ready historical transposition in applying the Bible to the contemporary world, might on occasion work in the opposite direction. A sermon of Thomas Lynford, also delivered in 1679, demonstrates the narrative fluidity by which the seventeenth-century Jesuits could be inserted into the scriptural story: "It had vexed the Jesuits of Baal-peor to see Jehosaphat walk in the steps of his father Asa," and the response of these biblical "Jesuits" is, like their putative descendants, to pronounce Jehosaphat a heretic, and thus "he might lawfully be deposed."¹² Lynford then proceeds to note the echoes and isomorphisms of history in a series of discursive parallels:

And now who can better describe the sad distraction of poor Judah than we ourselves, who have been in as great fears of the like destruction? Were their Estates and Fortunes, their Priviledges and Immunities, their Lives and Liberties in jeopardy, so have ours been?¹³

Even if early modern readers found their acts of transposition a politically invigorating mode of analysis, we might suppose that such a mode of reading seemed arbitrary at times to contemporaries, but for a number of reasons early modern writers were adamant that this was not so. The Bible, it was widely presumed, compelled in all but its most willful readers—invariably one's political enemies—a degree of necessary assent. While other books might permit arbitrary readings, the scriptures contained their own mechanism for right interpretation, except when, as Peter has it in a much quoted verse, "They that are unlearned and unstable wrest the Scriptures to their owne destruction."¹⁴

John Hales in 1617 writes that biblical reading inherently transforms the manner in which it is read. The Bible compels its own reading protocols: "Other Expositions may give rules and directions for understanding their Authors, but Scripture gives rules to Exposition it self, and interprets the Interpreter."¹⁵ In this quite common understanding of the reading of the Bible—that it "interprets the Interpreter"—the exegete functions as intermediary of meaning, as constructive rather than passive in the process of establishing sense between word and thing, a practice that demands the reader be a fit and ready conduit for meaning. This specifically Lutheran slant on the exegetical process is one in which scripture interprets not just itself but, as Gerald Bruns puts it in his impressive account of the history of hermeneutics, "everything in its path," including the reader.¹⁶ The Bible acts as a kind of hermeneutic vacuum cleaner, sucking up

12. Thomas Lynford, *A Sermon Preached Before the Right Honorable The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London* (London, 1679), 2.

13. Ibid.

14. 2 Peter 3:16, quoted by, for example, Henry Hammond, *Of resisting the lawfull magistrate under colour of religion* (Oxford, 1644), 18, 33.

15. John Hales, *A sermon preached at St Maries in Oxford upon Tuesday in Easter weeke 1617 Concerning the abuses of obscure and difficult places of holy Scripture, and remedies against them* (Oxford, 1617), 4.

16. Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 148.

and altering the contours of every object that it comes into exegetical contact with, most specifically the exegete, but equally the politics, the culture, or the revolution in which it was deployed. Everything is transposed through the catalytic scriptures. It is in this sense that we might consider the opening quotation from Woodward: "I thank God that I did search the scripture: for now I can give a full and cleare account of all the affairs now a days."¹⁷ The Bible, deemed to transpose and alter everything it comes in contact with, is both an interpretative prism and a historical palimpsest of contemporary events.

We might well say that this Lutheran "interpreting the interpreter," in its transformative power, is no longer "reading" by any parameters that the history of reading might want to set itself. It is a mystical condition, if not an illusory one, and in any case it hardly characterizes quotidian reading experience. It is not, for all that, unimportant as a model of reading, the primary outcome of which is the ability to interpret. Bruns describes this model of Renaissance reading as stemming from a specific hermeneutic desire that differs fundamentally from most later approaches to the text, being "far from the condition of cognitive objectivity in which one reflects oneself out of the hermeneutical situation and regards the text from a historical-critical or analytical distance."¹⁸ "Application" of the Bible to the present in the seventeenth century was not seen as an arbitrary drawing of a moral, nor even as an instance of political exemplarity, in the same way that Livy might present an imitable model for action. It constituted rather the intrinsic manifesting of and opening of the present through the Bible's interpretative engine. In many such formulations, it is the Bible that reads the person or the political crisis, rather than the reverse, and as such it resisted mere political expediency. The Bible, at least in the hands of those who did not willfully misconstrue its meaning, remained a model of utter perspicuity. As Hales puts it: "Scripture is a rule which will not fit it self to the obliquity of our conceits, but our perverse and crooked discourse, must fit it self to the straightness of that rule. A learned Writer in the age of our fathers, commenting upon Scripture, spake most truly, when he said, *That his Comments gave no light unto the Text, the Text gave light unto his Comments.*"¹⁹ This is a mode of reading in which the reader, almost imperceptibly, almost simultaneously, shifts from Old into New, like somebody adept at mentally converting one currency into another. But such an analogy is only partly accurate because it emphasizes the facility of the interpreter. More crucial to the hermeneutics of typological interpretation is the manner in which the text acts as conduit and catalyst for the immediate transformative action of God on the political present in the ceaseless reiteration of the politics

17. Woodward, *The Kings chronicle*, A2.

18. Bruns, *Hermeneutics*, 146.

19. John Hales, *A sermon . . . Concerning the abuses of obscure and difficult places of holy Scripture*, 4. Francis White, for example, attacking Catholic arguments that tradition was necessary to avoid heterodoxy in interpretation, writes: "*that which Protestants hold, concerning the perspicuity of sacred Scripture, euen in it selfe. Ireneus saith, All the Scriptures both Propheticall and Euangelicall, are cleere without ambiguity, and may indifferently bee heard of all men*"; *A replie to Jesuit Fishers answere to certain questions propounded by his most gracious Matie: King Iames* (London, 1624), 44.

of the Bible. The reader is mere conduit for and observer of the omnipresent time of divine action.

This reading-writing strategy produces what I would see as the consummate early modern political lexis, the common currency of the pulpit, repeated across court sermons and in dissenting parish churches as a primary mode of reading the scriptures. It constituted a model of understanding and a model of reading that crossed classes and denominations, and it was certainly not confined to a reading elite, though much of the evidence for the social breadth of reading, which I will pursue in the next section, comes from those limited periods when censorship was lax. While both the classics and the Bible might serve to gloss the present with their political insight and while both might serve didactic and indeed revolutionary purposes, there are some significant differences. Unlike classical models, biblical typologies were seen as being written into the fabric of history, the marrow of historical pattern. The moral heft of the Bible, when biblical oppressions or rebellions were reimagined in the present, was a powerful rhetorical tool, and it is to the applications of meaning, some specific examples of transposing the Bible to the politics of the era, to which I now turn.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam: Early Modern Typologies

The Old Testament kings provided both a model for chastising rebellion and, in other hands, the primary mandate for and language of protest. To explore such usage, I will take up here a small number of readings on the division of the Solomonic kingdom into the Israel of Jeroboam and the Judah of Rehoboam. The range of typologies this produced is vast, with many early modern writers expressing deep grievances against oppressive government, while others making direct comment on the constitutional implications of such kingship. The scope of such writing is great, and I aim less to provide a comprehensive account of their discursive use, and the range of circumstances to which they were applied, than to indicate the kind of content-based history of reading that might be derived from scriptural commentary. Jeroboam was the consummate rebel, though troublingly, a rebel with God's mandate, while Rehoboam, Solomon's son and presumably the rightful heir by any patrilineal notion, was taken as the epitome of oppressors and tyrants. "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins," warns Rehoboam to the grumbling Israelites: "my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."²⁰ The mapping of such resonant scriptural phraseology onto the present was the stock-in-trade of political thought, the medium for some of the era's most vehement expressions of complaint and dissent.

Scriptural kings feature, both in passing reference and in extended dissertation, as a ready shorthand and for lengthy political exegesis. Few names are spat with more venom in the era than that of Jeroboam who, aside from being a usurper and a former servant of Solomon, also raised up priests from a non-Levite caste in an act that was for some redolent of the worst kind of leveling. The royalist elegist Henry King rages at the upending of social hierarchies in the Commonwealth and the rise of the rabble to posi-

20. AV, 1 Kings 12:11–12.

tions of religious and military authority in the Civil War by noting how it is as bad as that worst act of worst biblical kings:

Indeed we cannot less from such expect,
Who for this Work of Ruine are Elect:
This Scum drawn from the worst, who never knew
The Fruits which from Ingenuous Breeding grew,
But take such low Commanders on their Lists,
As did revolted Jeroboams Priests.²¹

King's "scum," in particular, are those in the New Model Army who were guilty of the perfidious killing of two royalist gentleman soldiers. Few more serious insults could be devised than the comparison to Jeroboam's priests, with its implication of utter unfitness to the military role, though the social miscegenation at stake in King's poem is of army class: the "ingenuous breeding" of the perpetrators sets them apart from the Cromwellian military.²² The royalist apologist John Maxwell similarly notes in 1644 the elevation of lower-class figures to the priesthood, with a telling gesture to parliamentary insistence on "root and branch" reform: "the old Priests must be gone; the Tribe of *Levi* must be rooted out Root and Branch: It cannot be, but the old Levites will cross the new established Government. The basest of the people, Tinkers, Cobblers, Coachmen, Mechanics, &c. become *Jeroboam's* and his new Subjects Priests."²³ But class disdain might work in both directions, against the Church of England and Puritan wings of the ecclesiastical divide. The prolific sermon writer Thomas Adams argues in 1626 that the base priests were the fit correlate of the king's choice to worship idols: "When *Jeroboam* had set up his two Idols in Israel, hee rakes up his Priests out of the common kennell; the basest of the people were good enough for such a bastard deuotion: wooden priests were fit enough to wayt upon golden Deities."²⁴ For a minister who had vociferously opposed the accommodation with Catholic Europe implied in James VI and I's attempts at Spanish and French matches, such comments take a swipe at both royal policy and High Anglican priesthood.

A vast set of social antagonisms play out around the "ambitious aspirer" Jeroboam and his function as a kind of Machiavellian politician.²⁵ Figures as diverse as the Puritan Henry Burton and the Spanish priest Cristóbal de Fonseca can both assert that Jeroboam was "a great Politician" (in the most negative sense), not only in how he negotiated the division of the kingdom but also in his setting up of rival centers of worship, which functioned simultaneously to reduce the power of Jerusalem and to

21. Henry King, "An Elegy on Sir Charls Lucas and Sir George Lisle" in *Poems, Elegies, Paradoxes, and Sonnets* (1657; Menston, U.K., 1973), Appendix, p. 15 (separately paginated).

22. See Andrea Brady, "Dying with Honour: Literary Propaganda and the Second English Civil War," *Journal of Military History* 70, no. 1 (2006): 9–30.

23. John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta regum majestas, or, The sacred and royal prerogative of Christian kings. Wherein sovereignty is by Holy Scriptures, reverend antiquity, and sound reason asserted, by discussing of five questions* (London, 1644), 118.

24. Thomas Adams, *Five sermons preached upon sundry especiall occasions* (London, 1626), 26.

25. George Morley, *The Bishop of Winchester's vindication* (London, 1683), 170.

uphold Israel as a political entity.²⁶ Jeroboam justifies his creation of the golden calves for his new religious shrines with the disingenuous claim: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." The Geneva Bible comments, more aggressively than usual: "So craftie are the carnal persuasions of princes, when they wil make a religion to serve their appetite."²⁷ Phineas Fletcher, the Protestant epic poet, argues in his commentary on the first Psalm that there remains an inscrutable difference between the worldly strategies of kings and God's plan: "That devise of Jeroboam . . . not suffering the people to carry their sacrifices to *Jerusalem*, & there to worship, thrusting the *Priests* and *Levites* out of their possession, as favourers of the kingdom of *David*, & with them *Gods* worship; was in the sight of man sound policie," but, he goes on, sound, if ungodly, policy cannot withstand God's plans, indeed it often proves the instrument by which the divine will manifests itself: "being opposite to the word, was, and so proved the notablest folly in the world, & wrought the contrary end, not the establishing his house and kingdome as he intended, but the utter subversion of it."²⁸

Such a perception, that the text might instance the kind of religious Machiavelianism practiced at the courts of kings, however, was vigorously rebutted in one of the most substantial typological works of the period, Joseph Hall's *Contemplations upon the principall passages of the Old Testament*, a series of commentaries published over the 1620s. For Hall, Jeroboam's kingship was plainly a tale of malevolent political maneuvering and the work of malcontents. The people, he maintained, had quickly spied out "the weaknesse of their new Sovereigne [Rehoboam], else they durst not have spoken to him by so obnoxious a tongue."²⁹ The scheming of the people was evident and deep-rooted, and darkly compounded by the low estate of Jeroboam, who had spent the latter years of the old king's reign hiding in Egypt, and Hall draws the moral that "Jeroboam had secretly troubled these wateres, that he might fish more gainfully: One malecontent is enough to imbroyle a whole Kingdom." Hall doubts, indeed, that there were any grounds for complaint against Solomon at all, in a reading of the passage that was hotly disputed and that, it quickly becomes evident, addressed early modern instances of oppression: "For ought I see, the suggestion was not more sightfull then unjust: where was the weight of this yoke, the toile of these services." He points out that the reign was without war, characterized by good policy and the laudably careful wealth-gathering that led to Solomon's opulence. Posthumous complaint was, then, mere ingratitude: "The multitude is ever prone to picke quarrels with their Governors, and whom they feared alive, to censure dead."³⁰

26. Henry Burton, *A replie to a relation, of the conference between William Laude and Mr. Fisher the Jesuite. By a witnesse of Jesus Christ* (Amsterdam, 1640), 355; Cristóbal de Fonseca, *Devout contemplations . . . Englished by. I. M.* (London, 1629), 594.

27. Geneva Bible (London, 1560), 1 Kings 12:28.

28. Phineas Fletcher, *The way to blessednes a treatise or commentary, on the first Psalme* (London, 1632), 211.

29. Joseph Hall, *Contemplations upon the principall passages of the Old Testament in Works* (London, 1628), 1236. On Hall's *Contemplations*, see Richard McCabe, *Joseph Hall: A Study in Satire and Meditation* (Oxford, 1982), 215–53.

30. Hall, *Contemplations*, 1327.

Hall is taken to task by Ezekias Woodward, who illuminates some of the contemporary investments in the story: "A grave divine sayes and we will heare him out, none but what were easie and ingenious: The people are querulous, full of complaints still, they whine and cry for nothing."³¹ Woodward argues, on the contrary, that the Israelites were "the freest people in the world and cannot endure yokes, nothing that tends to servitude." Such a statement evokes the emotive accusation of the yoke so widely used in revolutionary complaint: "I do not say what yokes there are, but I say the Labourers there may have their wages for their worke: and they that do a kind of service there, may have a full allowance for that, and yet for all that there may be a grievous servitude upon Israel."³² If contemporary readers are unable to empathize with the oppressed Israelites, and tend, like Hall, "lightly to passe over Israels Yoakes, and account them feathers," this is because of a lack of "sympathy of fellow-feeling: this partnership or companions-ship with others in their misery is a rare grace."³³ Though this seems briefly like a nascent economic class consciousness, it is only fleetingly so; and Woodward returns to a more seventeenth-century set of concerns when he argues that the true yoke under which the people labored was idolatry, that "Solomon has married the *Daughter of a strange god*," itself an accusation levied not infrequently at Stuart attempts to procure Catholic marriage alliances with France and Spain.³⁴

John Donne suspects that the threat of scorpions instead of whips rouses the people not as a result of Solomon's oppressive reign, but merely because it was so wittily caustic a reply to their complaints: "*Rehoboams people* were more confounded, with that scornfull answer of his to them, when they were come . . . then they were with the grievances themselves, for which they came; when the King would not onely be *cruelly* sharp, but *wittily* sharp upon them, this cut on every side, and pierced deep."³⁵ A cutting tongue is not, however, the extent of Rehoboam's cruelty for others, who take the oppression more seriously and ally it to contemporary economic deprivations. Lancelot Dawes, in a 1653 sermon, traces among the various plagues affecting the land the "*grinding oppressour*" who "eateth up the poor as if they were bread . . . enhaunceth his rents, and pilleth his poor tenants, and doubleth, yea, treableth their fines, telling them, with young *Rehoboam*, that *his little finger shall be heavier then his fathers loynes*. Not contented with this cruelty, he thrusteth them out of their houses, and depopulateth whole townes."³⁶ William Gearing, in a Great Fire text, likewise counts the oppressions of the wealthy as the typological reiteration of Solomon and Rehoboam, and also as an underlying providential cause of God's retribution on London: "when men grinde the faces of their needy Brethren . . . their own poverty (like *Solomon*)

31. Woodward, *The Kings chronicle*, 29.

32. *Ibid.*, 30.

33. *Ibid.*, 31. On the use of the "yoke" in Civil War discourse, see Christopher Hill, *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution, revisited* (Oxford, 1997), 361–65.

34. On Jacobean accusations, see Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge, 1989), 20–36; and for corresponding Caroline attacks, Michelle White, *Henrietta Maria and English Civil Wars* (Aldershot, U.K., 2006), 91–121.

35. John Donne, *Fifty sermons* (London, 1649), 206.

36. Lancelot Dawes, *Sermons preached upon severall occasions* (London, 1653), 81–82.

chastiseth them with whips, and your oppression (like *Rehoboam*) whips them with Scorpions; and as he told the oppressed people, that his finger should be heavier than his Fathers loins . . . you are the Wine-pressers squeezing out the blood of the poor.”³⁷

Such typological readings, with Rehoboam reconfigured as the oppressor of the poor, are among the fiercest rhetoric to be found in the period, expressing deep social antagonisms. Plainly, too, they troubled the authorities greatly. A writer of the newsletter *Mercurius Aulicus* in 1643 attacks what he sees as the increasing number of sermons that use biblical typologies, and reports a sermon that “likened the King to Rehoboam in forsaking his old Councell.”³⁸ In 1650 John Price sees the biblical text as speaking directly to present circumstances: “just as the last King [Charles] did multiply Oppressions and cruelties upon the Nation above what his father did,” so too Rehoboam insists on arbitrary kingly authority. Price similarly notes the nature of the divisions in the country, the “deadly feude alwayes after between *Rehoboam* and *Jeroboam* (as is now between the Royallists and Parliamenteers).”³⁹ Milton, writing in *Eikonoklestes*, thinks he has discovered, effectively, an admission by King Charles that “presents him still in his own words another *Rehoboam*, soft’nd by a farr wors Court then *Salomons*, and so corrupted by flatteries . . . how voluptuously, how idly rainging in the hands of other men, he either tyranniz’d or trifl’d away those seventeen yeares of peace, without care, or thought, as if to be a King had bin nothing els in his apprehension, but to eat and drink, and have his will, and take his pleasure.” The Caroline court re-enacts the simultaneous luxury and oppression that was the cause of Israel’s division. Charles “acted in good earnest what *Rehoboam* did but threat’n, to make his little finger heavier then his Fathers loynes, and to whip us with his two twisted Scorpions both temporal and spiritual Tyranny, all his Kingdoms have felt.”⁴⁰



Such a range of examples of the deployment of two relatively obscure biblical kings reveals a rich and ready language of early modern complaint, and a culture well practiced in the nuances of biblical interpretation. Social antagonisms, class slurs, religious neglect, and accusations of oppression are among the many uses of typology encountered so far. Biblical kings are read with familiarity and fury, allowing writers of all religious and political hues to transpose the scriptures to the present. This is of still greater significance when it is the *political* moment of the present, when typologies are used to characterize the ruler, be it king or protector. This, indeed, is what seventeenth-century typologies are best known for. Tracing the deployment of the figure of Jer-

37. William Gearing, *God’s sovereignty displayed from Job 9. 12 . . . A discourse shewing, that God doth, and may take away from his creatures what hee pleaseth . . . with an application of the whole, to the distressed citizens of London, whose houses and goods were lately consumed by the fire* (London, 1667), 94.

38. *Mercurius Aulicus* (London, 21 May 1643).

39. John Price, *The cloudie clergi* (London, 1650), 12.

40. John Milton, *Eikonoklestes in answer to a book intitld Eikon basilike the portrature His Sacred Majesty in his solitudes and sufferings the author J. M.* (London, 1650), 199–200.

oboam across the major debates on legitimacy and constitutional crises in the latter part of the century shows the surprising subtlety and diversity of reading practice. The remainder of this essay offers, so far as space allows, further evidence of the adaptability of scriptural kings, as well as the breadth and longevity of these typological modes of reading. The figure of Jeroboam, in the ensuing examples, is applied most obviously against Parliament in the Civil War and into the Interregnum, but he is also adopted regularly as a slur on English kingship in Catholic attacks on its legitimacy and, more idiosyncratically, as a model to defend the revolution in 1688.

The most evident candidate for the mantle of Jeroboam is Cromwell, whose status as non-aristocratic usurper made him particularly odious in the eyes of many royalists. The frontispiece of Anthony Sadler's *The Subjects Joy* (1660) shows Cromwell as Jeroboam, alongside a satyr-devil, both clasping at the usurped emblems of state, one of innumerable post-facto identifications of the Protector and his regime with Jeroboam, the arch-usurper of the Bible.⁴¹ The biblical kings are essential elements in the central constitutional debates of the era: whether the people have a right to choose (or depose) their monarchs. For some, Jeroboam, and Cromwell along with him, are evidence of the people's manifest incompetence and inability to choose wisely. William Cole, writing in 1661, uses the people's rejection of Rehoboam as proof of the unfitness of the people to choose their kings:

God hath not left a people liberty to carve out the model of their own authority, and take it up, or cast it off as their own reason or passion shall dictate to them . . . for so there should be as many sorts of Kings, as Israel had of gods, and as many sorts of Governments, as distemper'd brains could fancie to themselves. The title of *Jeroboam* was not the better for the unanimous consent of the ten Tribes in that revolt.⁴²

Similarly focused use of biblical typology occurs earlier in the events of the revolution, when Parliament is accused of mimicking the actions of Jeroboam, in its claim that the voice and support of the people are their justification for war. In his 1644 text, *Sacro-sancta regum majestas*, John Maxwell asserts how the story of Rehoboam and Jeroboam shows the inability of the people to set up kings or to act, as Parliament so evidently was, against the authority of the monarch. For Maxwell, as for so many writers, the biblical tales act to interpret the present: "This Story duely considered, is able to rectifie the Errours of this time if mens minds be not fore-stalled with damnable

41. See, for example, George Wharton, "Upon The Detestable Life, And Accursed Death of Oliver, Lord PRO-TRAYTOR OF England," *Select and choice poems* (London, 1661), 87–88; Anon., *On the death of that grand imposter Oliver Cromwell, who died September the 3. 1658* (London, 1661), broadsheet; Alexander Brome, *Rump, or, An exact collection of the choycest poems and songs relating to the late times by the most eminent wits from anno 1639 to anno 1661*. (London, 1662), 55; anon., *Bradshaw's ghost being a dialogue between the said ghost, and an apparition of the late King Charles* (London, 1659), 5.

42. William Cole, *Noah's dove with her olive-branch, or, The happy tidings of the abatement of the flood of England's civil discords* (London, 1661), 10.

Prejudice. It layeth open to us, that Kings when they are Peoples Donatives are not Successful.”⁴³

Perhaps more surprising is the extensive Catholic use of typologies, which showed equal facility at applying the Bible to the current state of England, and in which Jeroboam as the exemplar of schism featured widely. Such applications are commonplace in the early years of the Stuart dynasty, when accusations of constitutional illegitimacy came from powerful Continental and English voices.⁴⁴ However, Catholic typological attacks do not die away later in the century, and provide some grounding for the fears and paranoia that so often seem to drive Puritan and Parliamentary writings. Catholic accounts take Jeroboam to their typological heart, rendering him as the model of the Protestant schism. The Jesuit Thomas Carwell, in a work dated 1658, makes the national typology of Judah and Israel explicit: “For *Juda* being the Orthodox Church, united with her Head, the High Priest, and not tainted with any Doctrinal errors, what need, I pray, was there of her reformation?”⁴⁵ Dipping back into the Jacobean and Caroline historical disputes, Carwell accuses the consummate High Anglican, William Laud, of misinterpreting the way that Judaic history applies to the present: “he supposes that *Juda* is the *Protestant party*; which is also false,” and he gives a series of examples by which Protestantism is unable to claim Judah’s mantle.⁴⁶ In a text first published in 1672, Hugh (Serenus) Cressy, the Benedictine monk and, before his conversion, a member of the Great Tew circle, constructs a dialogue teaching Catholics who “are not at leasure to read *Volums of Controversies*” how to defend their religion. Among the retorts to the Protestant’s charges of Catholic covetousness and luxury is this contribution: “Now *Sir*, tell me sincerely, If you were to establish a *Church*, would you take for your pattern that *Schismatical King Jeroboam*, who chose *Priests from the dreggs of the People*; or *God* himself, who instituted a splendid *Clergy*?”⁴⁷

A final example of the deployment of Jeroboam, in yet another variation, comes in the context of the revolution of 1688, when Jeroboam’s election to kingship becomes a precedent for William, parachuted on to the throne, with evidently weak credentials, apart from his not being Catholic.⁴⁸ In *Reflections upon the late great revolution written*

43. John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta regum majestas*, 118. Samuel Rutherford answers the text in *Lex, Rex; the law and the prince. A dispute for the just prerogative of king and people*. (London, 1644). Maxwell’s text was re-issued in 1689, to meet the era’s next constitutional crisis of kingly authority.

44. Martinus Becanus, *The English Jarre. or disagreement amongst the ministers of great Brittain, concerning the Kinges supremacy*, trans. I. W. P. (Saint-Omer, 1612), 54. King James I, *A remonstrance of the most gracious King James I. King of Great Brittain, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c. For the right of kings, and the independance of their crownes. Against an oration of the most illustrious Card. of Perron, pronounced in the chamber of the third estate* (Cambridge, 1616); On James’s biblical writing, see Jane Rickard, “The Word of God and the Word of the King: The Scriptural Exegeses of James VI and I and the King James Bible” in *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority, and Government*, ed. Ralph Houllbrooke (Aldershot, U.K., 2006), 135–50.

45. Thomas Carwell, *Labyrinths cantuariensis* (Paris, 1658), 160.

46. *Ibid.*, 161.

47. Serenus Cressy, *Question: Why are you a Catholic? The answer follows. II. Question: But why are you a Protestant? An answer attempted (in vain)* (London, 1686), 36.

48. For an incisive account of the crisis, see Jonathan Scott, *England’s Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge, 2000), 205–26.

by a lay-hand in the country for the satisfaction of some neighbours (1689)—a text attributed to, though probably not by, Daniel Defoe—Jeroboam serves a set of rhetorical purposes that earlier in the century only appeared in what were deemed the most treasonous Jesuitical claims about the rights of succession to the English throne, as a model for God's occasional intervention in the patrilinear process, by which Solomon's son, Rehoboam, should have inherited the throne.⁴⁹ God, however, removes this apparent full warrant and directs Israel instead to the choice of the people. For the author of the text, writing in support of William, neither the evident idolatrous deeds that Jeroboam will commit, nor his raising non-Levite allies to the priesthood or his lack of regal lineage, are any bar to the throne. Jeroboam's title rests on God's direct designation of him as king and on its demonstration by the somewhat bizarre theater of the cloth, in which the prophet Ahijah the Shilnoite emblemizes the action that God enjoins upon Jeroboam by tearing away the garment he is wearing and ripping it into twelve pieces, ten of which he gives to Jeroboam, thus showing God's will that the kingdom be divided into the ten tribes of Israel and the two of Judah.⁵⁰ God will, we are assured, depose kings who do not measure up:

So true is sometimes that saying, *Vox Populi est Vox Dei*. But this last Instance does afford us another Observation, which I think ought not to be past over in silence; and that is, That God does not tye himself to a Family or Line.

Jeroboam's non-lineal succession, combined with the example of Solomon being anointed while his father, David, was alive, proves "[t]hat a King may have a Successor, even while he lives," and, the author adds, "may prove something which may be of some use in our present Dispute" (p. 16). Jeroboam's subsequent recalcitrance may be reprehensible, but it is, the writer asserts, separate from the conditions of his election, "not performing those Conditions on which he was raised to the Crown" (p. 18).



In this admittedly limited look at constitutional argument, we see that Jeroboam is appropriated by Anglican-Royalists, English and International Catholics, and fiercely anti-Jacobean Protestants. He is made to prefigure, typologically, the extremes of Puritanism, rebellion, and republicanism, a model of unconstitutional Protestant schism and a fiercely anti-Catholic, anti-Stuart position, in which the Crown is barely

49. See Robert Persons, *A conference about the next succession to the crowne of England* (Antwerp, 1595), 128, attributed variously to William Allen, Richard Verstegen, and others, published under the name of Robert Doleman.

50. 1 Kings 11:29–31, anon. (attrib. Daniel Defoe), *Reflections upon the late great revolution written by a lay-hand in the country for the satisfaction of some neighbours* (1689), 15. On the authorship, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *Defoe De-Attributions: A Critique of J. R. Moore's Checklist* (London, 1994), 3.

hereditary—an extraordinary variety of readings and reading techniques. The use of biblical argument is widespread, to the point of endemic, in the constitutional debate of the era and yet is largely absent from critical discussion of the subject, introduced primarily as the somewhat dismissive “proof text.” That historiography so often discusses “classical republicanism” as the basis of political thought in the long revolutionary moments of the 1640s, 1650s, and 1680s while neglecting its biblical aspects seems to me to be a major scholarly blind spot.⁵¹ The same could be said of the history of reading as it has emerged over the past two decades, which has similarly been concerned with how people read their classics and how this was tuned to contemporary events, but not with the equally prestigious and vastly more widespread practice of biblical reading.

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51. Exceptions, especially in the study of Milton, include: Walter S. H. Lim, *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (Newark, Del., 2006); and Warren Chernaik, “Biblical Republicanism,” *Prose Studies* 23 (2001): 147–60. It is questionable whether “biblical republicanism” is an entirely coherent term, there being no such republic in the Bible, but it hints at its role in constitutional debate that is ignored in historiography.